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ABSTRACT

Work Inc., a community rehabilitation center south of Boston, provides moderately to severely disabled (primarily mentally retarded) students with paid work opportunities while they are still in school. In the Work Inc. program, the Greater Boston business community becomes part of the daily curriculum of 500 students in 35 different communities within a two-hour radius of Boston. The program is based on a cooperative model that combines the strengths of the school and the community rehabilitation center. Work Inc. provides direct help to schools in the form of consultation services. Students are given assistance in making a smooth and effective school-to-work transition through two programs--an in-school work program and a community employment program. In the in-school work program, students spend between one and three hours daily doing industrial subcontract work (including salvaging, collating, sorting, assembling, packing, and heat sealing). Students are paid approximately half the going industrial rate, earning about $36.00 for two weeks' worth of industrial work (two hours each day). The community employment program provides supported employment at 24 sites, offering a variety of industrial and janitorial experiences. The program is based on an enclave model with 5-10 workers. The average two-week paycheck for a student working 50 percent of the time is $55.00 at an industrial site and $75.00 for janitorial work training (30 hours per week). Besides providing disabled students with valuable work experience, Work Inc. has raised parents', teachers', and administrators' general awareness of the students' abilities. (MN)

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COOPERATIVE CAREER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Good morning! My name is Dena Shaver Stern. I am employed by Work Inc., a community rehabilitation center south of Boston. I am the Program Manager for the Cooperative Career Education Program - a program servicing moderately to severely disabled, primarily mentally retarded, students. My program is one which provides paid work opportunities for special needs students while they are still in school, using the Greater Boston business community as a part of their daily curriculum. These experiences can occur either in their classroom, or out in the community.

In setting directions for the nineties for the special needs worker, we believe it is vital to begin work experiences early, and in the most realistic way possible. It is no longer acceptable to have simulated work situations for the 16 year old special needs learner. The Cooperative Career Education Program provides this population with the opportunity to experience real work and a real paycheck. Work Inc. has been involved with public and private schools; and special education collaboratives for the past 18 years. Currently my agency serves 500 students daily in 35 different communities within a two hour range around Boston.

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I will present you with a Cooperative Model which combines the strength of two - the school and the community rehabilitation center. With two sets of skills and knowledge, the training is stronger and more complete. Employment of the disabled worker is our expertise so we are in a position to share our knowledge with the schools in a cost effective manner.

The goal of the program is to help schools by directly providing services and consultation to make possible for moderate to severe special needs students to transition from school to work in a smooth, effective manner. We do this in two ways: either through the In-School Work Program or the Community Employment Program.

The In-School Work Program provides industrial subcontract work to students who may work between one to three hours a day in the classroom as part of their regular curriculum. The following are some samples of subcontract work materials:

Ivory soap - salvage job
Stop & Shop - collating
TRW Metal - sorting
NWO Headset - assembly, packaging, heat sealing

Work Inc.'s truck does weekly pick-up and delivery of subcontract work to the schools.

The students receive bi-weekly paychecks for subcontract work completed. The average two week paycheck for a student working at 50% of the industrial rate two hours each day in the In-School Program is approximately $36.00.

The program within the school is issued a Federal and State Labor Certificate. This is a Wage Exemption Certificate allowing pay below minimum wage based upon piece rated production. Essentially the school becomes a satellite program of Work Inc. Teachers receive training at Work Inc. where they learn the job of work supervisor. Attempts are made to develop strong work ethics. At this time a deep understanding of concerns unique to production work is encouraged. Areas such as quality control, respecting work deadlines, reinforcers and payroll procedures are taught. Ongoing consultation is given by the Cooperative Career Education Program staff, and teachers learn to generalize many of the workshop concepts into other areas of the curriculum, such as banking, time skills and work related vocabulary. The opportunity is created for the student to experience himself or herself, and have others view him or her, as a successful worker. A realistic base is built for that worker's future.

Another benefit that occurs if the In-School Work Program is implemented is a general raised awareness by the parents, teachers, administrators and peers of the students, of their abilities. Because the special needs students are observed in a work setting they instantly become aware of the importance of the real work for real money concept and now the association is concrete.

The other option of the Cooperative Career Education Program is the Community Employment Program. Work Inc. provides supported employment at 24 sites offering a variety of industrial/janitorial work experiences. Supported employment in our case is defined as paid supervised work in business or industry with extra supervision to ensure the worker success. It is a fact that students learn best in work environments that are realistic so we opened our supported employment program to the schools. The enclave model with 5-10 workers is used. This group of workers is under the direction of a Work Inc. supervisor.

The moderate to severe special needs student has generally not had the opportunity to work in the community. Supervised work sites offer this chance because of the supervision. This on-site work experience is thought to be one of

the best ways to lead to transition to work. The students can work part-time while still attending school on a alternating day basis. Because the work is being done primarily by a group of workers from Work Inc. it is possible to have students work part-time. The schedule can be arranged to accommodate both the student and the classroom teacher. The school appoints a liaison to coordinate the activities between school and work. This communication link is essential to maximize the student's success. Need areas are communicated back to the teacher so they can be addressed in the supportive school environment as they are addressed in the work setting. At the same time of course, successes are shared by both work place and school to reinforce the student as much as possible.

Students can work at more than one site depending upon interests, demonstrated skills and openings. A bi-weekly paycheck is given to the student who is now an employee of Work Inc. while on the job. The average two week paycheck for a student working at 50% at one of our industrial sites would be $55.00. The average two week paycheck for 30 hours of janitorial work training is $75.00. Transportation is usually provided by the school. The student may report directly to the work site or to Work Inc. to meet the supervisor and crew, and travel by van to the community employment site.

When a student reaches age 22, the age at which special education services end in Massachusetts, they will graduate and enter the adult service network. In Massachusetts there is a law, Chapter 688, which requires a plan be in place. When a student who has been working part time at Work Inc.'s Supported Employment Program reaches graduation, they can transition full-time into their position as funding is followed through by the appropriate adult agency. Upon graduation students move from part-time to full-time employment at Work Inc. and the transition from school to work is built in. Because Work Inc. runs the supported employment sites independently of the schools, students can transition directly in simply by increasing their hours.

The Boston Public Schools have seen 20 of their graduates transition into our community employment sites during this past year. These students did not have to wait at home for funding, or for an appropriate program slot to be found. They moved into an already tried, already successful job which was right for them. Funding was arranged while the student was in school because the school team knew this student was experiencing a successful program.

The recent guidelines for transition and post school employment stress the use of paid employment in the community as the best preparation for work after graduation. Both

components of the Cooperative Career Education Program are built upon this belief. We are experiencing growth in both parts of our program models, that is the In-School Work Program and the Supported Employment Program. However, we encourage greater use of our community employment program because of the obvious benefits. Work Inc.'s direction for the future is clear for the work experiences of the Boston area special needs student.

Both programs in the Cooperative Career Education Program provide a stage model which gives enough time and experience for even the most severly handicapped student to transition into supervised community employment. Our experience, and those of the schools over the past 18 years have shown a cost effective Cooperative model to work. The skills of the school and Work Inc. compliment each other in a working partnership. Through the Cooperative Career Education Program, paid work experiences at the highest level possible, and as early as possible will prepare the student for vocational success.